
NASA says that the Orion spacecraft, designed to replace the space shuttle, won't be launched until 2014 because of technical difficulties and budgetary pressures - meaning a four year gap between the last shuttle mission and the new vehicle's first flight. Matt McGrath reports:

With the three remaining space shuttles **due to retire** in 2010, NASA had hoped to have the Orion replacement craft **on the launch pad** by 2013. But now, they say, the window of opportunity **to accelerate** the project has closed, and the first mission is likely to be a trip to the International Space Station in September 2014.

NASA had hoped that **additional funding** from the US congress would have allowed an earlier launch but this has not been authorised. The delay means that the United States will be dependant on the Russian space agency **to ferry crews** to the ISS for almost four years.

Launched on top of a two stage Ares rocket, the Orion space craft is **a crucial part of NASA's vision** for the future, as it will be part of the programme that includes returning astronauts to the moon by 2020.

The Constellation program, as it is called, has **come in for strong criticism on the grounds of safety**. The Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel said the new vehicle might not be capable of providing adequate protection against hazards that will only **come to light** once the spacecraft is in operation. NASA, according to the report, was not **putting enough emphasis on** safety and reliability, and the program was facing difficulties with money, morale and leadership.

Matt McGrath, BBC

Vocabulary and definitions

due to retire	planned to be taken out of service
on the launch pad	ready to be sent into space (literally, a launch pad is a special area from which rockets or missiles are sent into the sky)
to accelerate	to speed up
additional funding	more money (than originally allocated)
to ferry crews	to carry astronauts into space and back (here, a crew means a group of people working together on board a spacecraft)
a crucial part of NASA's vision	a very important part of NASA's long-term plan
come in for strong criticism	been the object of/received many negative comments
on the grounds of safety	for safety reasons
come to light	become apparent/known
putting enough emphasis on	taking seriously enough (as a priority)

More on this story: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7555927.stm>

Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/newsenglish/witn/2008/08/080825_nasa.shtml